

National Work Readiness Credential Update
High Skills High Wages Strategy 1.3.5
Enhance “Employability Skills” Training in Workforce Development Programs

2006 is off to a great start for the National Work Readiness Credential (NWRC) project as we move closer to launching the NWRC assessments in the fall. When the NWRC goes “live” employers, training providers, and educators across the nation will have access to a reliable, validated assessment tool to assist them in evaluating an individual's readiness for entry-level work.

Since March 2006, a number of major milestones have been achieved.

- On the national front field tests are complete. Due to nationwide interest, additional field test sites were added in Los Angeles, CA; San Francisco, CA; Louisville, KY; Cleveland, OH; and Midland, TX.
- Stanford Research Institute (SRI) held the NWRC assessment “Cut-score” Workshop.
- The national Policy Oversight Committee, consisting of founding state partners transitioned to the National Work Readiness Council with a new slate of officers under the structure of a 501(c)3 organization.
- National funding to conduct a longitudinal study of the NWRC has been secured to ensure ongoing validation and data collection.
- Vendor proposals are pending selection of a national vendor to administer the NWRC, and
- Instate, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) staff met with policy makers and advocates from the disability community to ensure progress toward making the NWRC more accessible for people with disabilities.

Cut-Score Work Shop for the National Work Readiness Credential

In late March national test developers SRI, HumRRO, and the Center for Applied Linguistics met in Washington, D.C. to conduct further validation of the NWRC. Following over six months of field testing, SRI convened supervisor, subject matter experts from across the nation to determine the cut-scores for each question that would be included in the final version of the assessment modules. The purpose for cut-scores is to establish the minimum score on an assessment (or assessment battery) that one must achieve to receive the NWRC. The cut-score should distinguish between candidates who performed competently on the assessment and those who did not.¹

Washington State had two representatives serve on the national cut-score panel of thirteen members; Kathy Sherrill, a human resources administrator for Altek, Inc. engineering and manufacturing firm from Spokane and Teresa Sparks, a WorkSource job developer specializing in employment transition for offenders. A full list of Cut-Score Workshop panelists and Subject Matter Expert Background Information is included in Attachment A.

¹ Work Readiness Credential Cut-Score Workshop, March 13 – April 2, 2006, Washington, DC

Guided by the test developers the panelists used a standardized “bookmark method” for analysis of each question and corresponding answer. The task of the workshop participants was to reach consensus on what would constitute a “just sufficiently qualified” candidate.

Field test data from over 27 sites in 11 states was examined to prepare for setting the initial cut scores and validation analysis. Following a full three days of discussion, debate, and consensus building, the subject matter expert panelists reached agreement on the passing threshold for each NWRC test question that will be contained in the assessment battery.

National Governance – Key Transition Decisions

On April 20-21, 2006 members of the national Policy Oversight Committee met at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C. to review and take action on a number of key transition decisions:

- Longitudinal study design for the NWRC
- Timeline for the National Assessment Delivery Vendor search (RFP review process)
- Review of draft By-laws and Board Resolution for the National Work Readiness Council
- Transition of the national Policy Oversight Committee to the National Work Readiness Council and establishment of a Board of Directors
- Election of Officers

It was announced that Dollar General, a large East Coast retail chain (similar to our local dollar store chain) contributed \$140,000 to pay for the longitudinal study of the National Work Readiness Credential and a pilot project that will be conducted through the University of Tennessee Center for Literacy Studies. SRI will design the study and present a draft plan to the National Work Readiness Council by May 31, 2006.

The timeline and scoring criteria for the Assessment Delivery RFP review process was reviewed. All proposals were due to the U.S. Chamber Center for Workforce Preparation by April 19. A total of three proposals were received and it is anticipated that a contract will be awarded and in place by June 30, 2006.

State partners unanimously approved the By-laws for a governance structure for the National Work Readiness Council. This was a pivotal action that transitioned the national governance from a policy oversight committee to a National Council structure and the ability to apply for 501(c)3 status to complete the incorporation of the National Work Readiness Council. The National Work Readiness will be responsible for administering the oversight and management of the certification process.

A new Board of Directors was elected with the following membership.

- Andra Cornelius, Chair (Florida)
- Pam Lund, Vice-chair (Washington)
- Connie Spinner, Secretary (District of Columbia)
- Kip Bergstrom, Treasurer (Rhode Island)

Universal Access

On March 28, 2006, in preparation for the implementation design phase of the National Work Readiness Credential, Workforce Board Partnerships Team members hosted two demonstrations of the assessment for state education partners and leader-advocates from the disability community. The purpose of the meetings was to give state policy partners an opportunity to view the credential structure, provide an opportunity for dialogue with Stanford Research Institute (SRI) to learn about the development of the credential and make recommendations for improvement, and give Washington State policymakers feedback on how the credential would work for a variety of populations seeking entry-level employment.

A series of questions emerged from each NWRC demonstration session that provided important stakeholder input for consideration by the Policy Oversight Committee, SRI, and Washington State policy makers. The first session raised questions centered on cultural, ethnic, and language issues as well as the correlation between NWRC reading levels and nationally accepted learning standards. SRI noted that questions on the NWRC corresponded with Equipped for the Future Read with Understanding Performance Levels 2, 3, and 4. This correlation is shown in *EFF Level Correspondence NRS ABE/ASE ~ ESL*, a document that can be accessed on the Workforce Board website, www.wtb.wa.gov.

The second NWRC demonstration session was centered on information technology options and access for persons with disabilities. The subject matter experts in attendance provided specific recommendations for making the work readiness credential technology more accessible.

The participants in this session took a two level approach to their recommendations to SRI for meeting requests for reasonable accommodation. First, it appears there are a number of minor modifications to the web-based testing structure that could be made to embed optional accommodations into the programming and minimize the need for accommodation at the testing site. The second level of accommodation would be access to external assistive technology that was not embedded into the computer program format.

Following a sampling of each test module, the meeting participants made a number of recommendations to ensure universal access to the National Work Readiness Credential. It was further suggested that states look at alternative paths to earning a Work Readiness Credential for people with disabilities that can maintain the validity of the credential, i.e., other tests, portfolio, etc. There is the potential to field test the Work Readiness Credential with people with disabilities to capture additional data. Meeting participants from the University of Washington indicated they could assist in this effort.

Policy Implications & Next Steps

State policy framework continues to be discussed.

Business Affiliations for NWRC Cut Score Panelists

Kathie Sherrill is a human resources administrator for Altek Inc (altek-inc.com), an engineering/manufacturing firm.

Teresa Anita Sparks is a Work Source Specialist for the Washington State Employment Security Department.

Steven Hill is the Personnel and Safety Director for Allied Plastics Co (alliedplasticsco.com), a manufacturing firm.

Carol Clark handles Customer Service/Sales-Inside and Outside for Cornerstone Print & Imaging LLC (cornerstone-print.com).

Kim DeBautte is Multi-Func Manufacturing Supervisor for Lockheed Martine Missiles & Fire Control.

Paul Willis is a Supervisor for Signature Brands LLC (signaturebrands.com), a food manufacturing firm.

Frank Fuzo is the Vice President of the Yardville National Bank (ynb.com).

Joni Krieg Svoboda is the Executive Director of the Business & Education Alliance, Inc. (volunteersolutions.org/somerset/org/6870749.html), a non-profit organization.

Michele Underhill is the HR Director for Abilities of Northwest New Jersey (abilities-nw.com), a non-profit organization.

Terry McCormic is a Fabrication Supervisor for Casmin Inc. (casmin.com), a manufacturing firm.

Josephine (Joann) Krzysztof is a Supervisor for Home Health Aides/Training Coordinator for the Community Visiting Nurse Association (communityvna.org).

Murray Soland is a Master Foreman for Stuart Dean (stuartdean.com), a restoration/refinishing firm.

Edwin Montes is a Senior Foreman for Stuart Dean (stuartdean.com), a restoration/refinishing firm.